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Gorbachev's Plans: Westerners See a Lot of Zeal, but Little Basic Change

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MOSCOW, Feb. 22 — Since he took power 11 months ago, Mikhail S. Gorbachev has attacked economic problems with a zeal unmatched since Nikita S. Khrushchev disbanded entire layers of bureaucracy 25 years ago.

But despite all the zeal it has become apparent that he plans no fundamental changes in the centralized Soviet economy, according to Western economists and diplomats. And without profound change, they said, it is not likely that the Soviet economy can achieve the ambitious growth objectives set by Mr. Gorbachev and become more competitive with the West.

Sounding at times more like an evangelical preacher than a Communist leader, he has campaigned against corruption and alcoholism, exhorted workers to double their efforts, abolished Government agencies, dismissed scores of senior managers and talked bluntly about economic failings.

When the Communist Party convenes its 27th congress in Moscow on Tuesday, it is expected to approve, with little revision, a highly ambitious program for economic development through the year 2000. The plan includes specifics for development over the next five years, with longer-term priorities through the end of the century.

The plan, which reportedly went through at least four drafts before it satisfied Mr. Gorbachev's demands for growth, calls in part for doubling national income over the next 15 years, increasing labor productivity by 150 percent and ending the Soviet Union's chronic shortage of agricultural and consumer goods.

Plans Stop Well Short Of Radical Changes

But to many Western economists and diplomats Mr. Gorbachev's goals seem unattainable because his plans for change stop well short of the structural transformations they believe are needed to make the cumbersome, state-controlled economy more flexible and dynamic.

"It is now quite clear that Gorbachev has no intention whatsoever of introducing radical reforms in the Soviet economy, at least in this decade," Ed. A. Hewett, a specialist on the Soviet economy at the Brookings Institution, wrote in an article to be published soon in the quarterly Soviet Economy.

The second-ranking Soviet party official, Yegor K. Ligachev, left little doubt about the limits of change when he said last year that economic transformations would take place "within the framework of scientific socialism," without "any shifts toward a market economy or private enterprise."

Soviet officials have made it clear that they consider China's adoption of free-enterprise practices a dangerous and unacceptable departure from Marxist-Leninist principles.

Instead, Mr. Gorbachev's plan is to try to make the existing system work better by streamlining central management and giving individual enterprises greater autonomy.

His strategy to spur growth in the short term appears to depend heavily on gains in labor productivity produced partly by the anticorruption and anti-alcohol campaigns, plus the infusion of new managers.

That would buy time, in theory, for the wholesale modernization of the economy, including the introduction of advanced technologies, that Mr. Gorbachev has promised will generate rapid growth in the 1990's and beyond.

The Soviet military budget is classified, but Western diplomats said it appeared Mr. Gorbachev would like to limit the growth of military spending to help finance development in the civilian sector.

Soviet officials have said, however, that military matters would remain the highest priority. Specifically, they have cautioned that Washington would be mistaken if it assumes Moscow cannot afford to keep pace with the United States in the development of space-based weapons.

There has been some talk among Soviet economists about the need for more daring changes, but skepticism in the Soviet Union about the Gorbachev program is muted.

One reason is that initial Soviet figures show that the economy rebounded in 1985 after a lethargic first quarter, ending the year with a burst that brought the annual growth rate to 3.1 percent.

A Better Economy Brings Higher Hopes

Although Western economists said the recovery was based on better weather and temporary increases in labor productivity produced by the Kremlin's discipline campaign, Mr. Gorbachev's initiatives have raised expectations among many Russians.

Mr. Gorbachev's efforts, diplomats said, have also unsettled large segments of the bureaucracy threatened by a loss of power and the privileges that go with it.

Philip Hanson, a specialist on the Soviet economy at the University of Birmingham in England, concludes in another article soon to be published in the Soviet Economy journal that "the whole economic strategy being pursued by the new leadership probably appears radical to many Soviet citizens, including many senior officials."

The Soviet economy, after years of relatively robust growth in the 1960's and early 1970's, has struggled to advance in the last 10 years. From 1976 to 1980, according to figures published by the Central Intelligence Agency, the economy grew at an average rate of 2.6 percent a year.

The C.I.A. reported that growth remained in that range through the first half of the 1980's, with the exception of 1983, when it reached 3.7 percent because of an unusually good harvest.

Soviet figures, which are calculated on a different basis, showed growth running at an average annual rate of 3.2 percent from 1981 through 1985.

The five-year plan for 1986-90 that Mr. Gorbachev has proposed calls for an average annual growth rate, according to Soviet calculations, between 3.5 percent and 4.1 percent. In the 1990's he projected growth of more than 5 percent a year.

A Call for More Money For the Soviet Worker

During the next five years, according to the plan, the target figure for an increase in the average monthly per capita income will be between 13 percent and 15 percent. The target for the increase in industrial labor productivity is between 20 percent and 23 percent, and the production of a variety of household appliances is to increase by more than 130 percent.

The five-year plan, incorporating a special program for the development of consumer goods approved by the Politburo in 1985, envisions more than doubling the production by 1990 of different kinds of goods, including clothing, furniture, televisions and video players, and expanding the delivery of medical care and a host of service industries.

The plan puts a premium on improving quality as well as quantity. Mr. Gorbachev, reflecting a common sentiment among Russians, has often complained about shoddy consumer goods and indifferent services. Similar efforts launched by previous leaders produced only marginal improvements before collapsing.

In addition the plan calls for substan-

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